

The Meyer Castle



Renovated and owned by Mr. and Mrs. Sergio Urquiza

For the first time in its history, the Castle's lower level, tiled veranda, and surrounding grounds can be reserved for special events such as weddings and wedding receptions, engagement parties, anniversaries, bar mitzvahs and bas mitzvahs, graduation parties, corporate meetings and parties, bon voyage parties, and theme parties (Las Vegas night, Roaring Twenties, etc.). For further information call (312) 646-5613, (312) 849-1590, or (219) 865-8452.

The Meyer Castle is located on the south side of U.S. 30 in Dyer, Indiana. The mansion is situated on ten acres of land and the highest ground in the area. One enters the property through wrought iron gates set in Lannon stone pillars, and drives along a 1/4 mile driveway which circles the mansion. The grounds are terraced and many original plantings still survive with every tree native to Indiana . . .

The mansion is an outstanding example of Jacobethan Revival Architecture. A three story building of random ashlar Lannon stone construction, the house is highlighted by carved Indiana limestone stairways, trim and ornamentation.

The structure is divided into two main sections — the main house, and a garage/service wing angled to the southwest. The main house features two octagon-shaped bays located at the northeast and southwest corners.

A quarry-tiled porch stretches 125' long by 12' wide and wraps around the south. The porch railings and spindles are of Indiana limestone. There are 18" large, hand-carved limestone urns spaced at regular intervals among the spindles on the porch. A large double stairway leads from the lower level outdoor pool to the main (south) entrance at the second level, and is highlighted by large stone ball ornaments located at both ends of the steps. There is another 20' wide stairway on the northeast corner of the house at the octagon porch.

Three double-stack and four single-stack chimneys with limestone funnels and caps rise above the steeply pitched hip roof. The roof is laid with red clay slab tile and hip roll tile that still remains in good condition. All flashings, gutters and downspouts are of copper.

The large, three car garage is joined to the west side of the house and is angled towards the southwest.

All windows are either 3/8" cut or acid-etched crystal in a scored or diamond pattern. Exterior doors are solid oak with leaded glass inserts.

The grand entrance hall features north and south entrances with the principal entrance being from the south. The living room and octagonal porch are located to the east of the entrance hall. The study, kitchen, formal and informal dining rooms are located to the west. A large hallway and staircases divide the kitchen area from the maid's quarters and the garage below.

The grand entrance, living room, dining room, and grand staircase are highlighted by fine carved oak paneling and detailing. European craftsmen spent almost two years doing the carving on the mansion. The grand entrance features oak paneled walls as well as the two exterior doors. The grand staircase railings include facing griffons. There are carved rosettes, dragons, griffons, serpents and leaves throughout the main and upper floors. The balusters and railings were carved from 10" blocks of oak. A brass chandelier, weighing approximately 400 lbs., hangs in the grand entrance from the third floor ceiling.

The paneling and trim in the formal dining room is black walnut. The fireplace face, mantel and overmantel are unique due to their fine and intricate carving. The floors of the main (second) and third floors are solid teak parquet. On the stair landing between the main and third floors there is a magnificent stained glass window wall (north facade) with castle motifs.

The third level consists of four bedrooms and three baths. It is accessible via the grand staircase from the main floor. The ornate ceilings in the living room and the vestibules are continued to the third floor hallways.

The third floor is served by an elevator, dumb waiter, and a laundry chute.

Meyer Castle is significant as both an outstanding example of Jacobethan Revival Architecture and as a former home of one of Hammond's early millionaire businessmen, Joseph Ernest Meyer. A three and one-half story mansion of hand chiseled Lannon stone, this structure is a showcase of excellence in craftsmanship as shown in all its details.

Meyer was born on September 5, 1878, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. After his father died he was sent to an orphanage where he learned botany and printing. He worked as a printer first in Milwaukee, and later in Chicago. After working in Chicago, Meyer went to work for the Hammond Times.

Feeling the financial pinch caused by the size of his family (he had eight children), Meyer bought some land in Hammond, and drawing on his background in botany, Meyer began growing medicinal herbs which he then sold door-to-door. This evolved into the Indiana Herb Gardens, later renamed the Indiana Botanical Gardens. Meyer made a fortune from the sale of his herb medicines. He promoted his herbal therapy through a series of publications that included *The Herbalist & Herb Doctor* (1918), and *The Herbalist* (1934).

With the growth of his fortune Meyer branched out into other business activities. With the failure of the Calumet State Bank in 1933, Meyer saw an opportunity to get into banking. He bought the bank and reorganized it as the Calumet National Bank.

Seeking an impressive residence for himself and his family, Meyer hired Architect Cosbey Bernard, Sr., to design for him a mansion that would copy a Scottish castle once seen by Meyer. Construction began in 1929 on a specially selected hill site surrounded by woods . .

When completed in 1931, it was the largest and most lavish mansion in the Calumet region. Built in a large, park-like setting, Meyer was able to indulge his interest in botany. He covered the grounds with an abundance of trees, shrubs, flowers, and ground covers. Two stone windmills were built which one still exists. Two sunken rock gardens and a gazebo still grace the property. A goldfish pond, bird sanctuary, and fruit and berry orchards, were enjoyed by the family in the early years.

Meyer lived in the mansion until his death in 1950. His wife, Cecilia, remained in the mansion for several years after her husband's death. The estate was sold by the survivors in 1975 to the East Dyer Development Company after the death of Mrs. Meyer. The acreage surrounding the estate became the Castlewood Subdivision.



The first time I saw the Meyers' property it was nothing but trees and bushes. In 1925 it took me one week to clear a place on the property so I could get off the road. I then started to trim the trees and bushes. There were many of these but I especially remember an abundance of Hedge Apple and Blackberry bushes. My next job was to make a path to reach the upper part of the hill. So that I had water, I dug a shallow well. Terraces had to be made to hold the steeper parts of the hill. It was not long before I realized that a road had to be built leading to the top of the hill. This, I built. It was about 1500 feet long. I even curbed it so that it would look better and hold up. Although there had been many trees and bushes scattered all over the place I soon realized that I had to plant trees in different spots to make the place more beautiful. An acre and a half flower garden was then planted. This, I called my jig saw garden. I spent many hours admiring the many flowers here. I decided that a fish pool was needed to complete the garden. I dug a shallow well for water to fill the pool. The water flowed from a stone windmill. When I started this project I took pictures at the beginning and completion of each job. These were lost last year when my basement was remodeled. I believe they were mistakenly thrown out for a paper drive. This entire project which included work on a thirteen acre plot was done by me with the help of two small boys, a man with a team of horses and with the help of my old truck. The stone used was shipped by rail from a quarry in Illinois. About 150 car loads of stone were used. The so-called mansion was built six years after I started the project. Originally it consisted of eight large rooms and a garage with two rooms for a maid. The main house has a very large basement twice as big as the house itself. One of the upstairs bedrooms is 20' by 30' and had a bathroom with a 10' long tub. This was on display at the 1934 World Fair.

Clarence Kellman, Caretaker

Good Luck Dyer Soccer!

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